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UNCLAS MANAGUA 001328

STATE FOR WHA/CEN, NSC FOR FISK/GARCIA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NICARAGUA'S ELECTIONS (VIOLENTLY) HEATING UP

REF: MANAGUA 1195

¶1. (SBU) Summary: As Nicaragua's municipal elections draw closer, political violence is becoming a daily occurrence. The incidents are predominantly instigated by supporters of Daniel Ortega's Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) against members of the opposition Vamos con Eduardo-Constitutional Liberal Party (VCE-PLC). This has resulted in leaders of the opposition parties, civil society, and religious groups expressing concern about "the climate of violence that the FSLN had unleashed throughout Nicaragua." These incidents are expected to continue during the last 10 days leading up to the November 9 elections. The bulk of opposition campaign activity is going forward unmolested. Nonetheless, the recent violence does not bode well for the environment on election day. End Summary.

Acts of Violence

¶2. (SBU) Acts of political violence have been a regular occurrence since July, but as the November 9 municipal elections draw closer these incidents are becoming a daily occurrence. So far this week (October 26-30) there have been five separate acts of violence, with the latest incident taking place October 30. On that date FSLN supporters attacked a vehicle with VCE-PLC supporters, whom were returning from a campaign event. While the car was at a rotunda, FSLN supporters threw rocks and sticks at the vehicle's passengers and stabbed two people riding in the back of the pick-up. The injured passengers were taken to the hospital, where VCE-PLC mayoral candidate Eduardo Montealegre called on the police to provide security on the streets to avoid these incidents.

¶3. (SBU) Other acts of recent political violence include:

- October 29: FSLN supporters attacked VCE-PLC campaign staff outside a VCE-PLC campaign office, seriously injuring three VCE-PLC supporters. One of the victims required surgery. The event occurred when VCE-PLC staff walked out of their campaign office to stop the Ortega supporters from replacing Montealegre's party propaganda with FSLN propaganda. As reported by local media, "the Ortega mob" also attacked a VCE-PLC photographer and destroyed his camera;

- October 26: Citizen Power Councils (CPC, the Ortega government's extension into local politics and government) attacked two VCE-PLC campaign officials with rocks while the two traveled in Leon;

- October 26: CPCs attacked leaders of opposition parties in Ciudad Sandino (north of Managua) while the mayoral candidate was campaigning door-to-door in the city.

FSLN - Victim or Agitator?

¶4. (SBU) While most of the violence has been instigated by Ortega's FSLN supporters, the FSLN has also reported VCE-PLC-led violence. On October 21 media reported that a PLC supporter, during a PLC rally, fatally shot a FSLN supporter in Matagalpa (northeast of Managua).

¶5. (SBU) However, only FSLN party leaders have publicly promoted and defended the use of violence. On September 23, and in response to the September 20 FSLN-led violence in Leon (reftel), FSLN National Assembly Deputy Gustavo Porras said the FSLN "would defend the streets as a way to defend their power." On October 1, the quasi-official weekly "El 19" (controlled by First Lady Rosario Murillo), described the September 20 FSLN-led violence in Leon as a "demonstration of the pride of the people of Leon who responded to protect their streets."

Comment

¶6. (SBU) As Nicaragua's elections draw closer, political violence is becoming a daily occurrence. While both the FSLN and the VCE-PLC have provoked violence, the FSLN has been overwhelmingly responsible. There is concern among the opposition parties that the violence leading up to the local contests can intimidate the electorate, resulting in low voter turnout. Low voter turnout for the municipal contests would favor FSLN candidates across the country. In general, this predominantly FSLN-led political violence provides concern for the environment in which the elections will take place on November 9.

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